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**Education and employment for
young Aborigines**

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- investigate the stimulation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development and issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and unemployment;
- identify and analyse the factors affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour force; and
- assist in the development of government strategies aimed at raising the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour market.

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ABSTRACT

The position of young Aboriginal¹ people in the labour market and the education system has been of great concern to policy-makers. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, for example, drew attention to the importance of the lack of educational and employment opportunities while young in influencing the life chances of the people it reported on. Published information on this group is, however, limited. This paper aims to fill some of the gaps in knowledge concerning young Aborigines aged 15-24 years. It presents data from the 1986 Census on the educational attainment, labour force status and income of young Aborigines and compares them with other Australians in the same age group. Young Aborigines had lower levels of educational attainment using indicators of both years of schooling and qualifications. They were also less likely to be employed and more likely to be unemployed than their counterparts in the rest of the Australian population. Those in employment were more concentrated in the lower-skilled occupations and in the public sector than were other Australian youth. These differences had implications for income status. Among 15-19 year olds there was little difference in the median income of Aborigines and non-Aborigines, but among 20-24 year olds, where a larger proportion of non-Aborigines were in employment, the Aboriginal median income fell to 60 per cent of that of non-Aboriginal people. The data presented here provide a benchmark against which 1991 Census results will be compared.

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Foreword

In April 1992, Dr Anne Daly, Research Fellow at CAEPR, ANU, took up a concurrent half-time Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Research Fellowship. The ABS objectives in providing Research Fellowships are to allow greater use of ABS data in academic research and to encourage the development of new techniques for the analysis of data. In Dr Daly's case, a principal aim of applying for this competitive Fellowship was to allow unimpeded access to the Aboriginal population sub-file so that statistical analysis from the conceptual framework of human capital theory could be undertaken for the first time. Dr Daly's Fellowship runs to 30 September 1993 and in this time she plans to complete a monograph with the working title 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Australian Labour Market'.

This discussion paper, based on 1986 Census data, provides an analysis of the employment status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. This paper is very policy-relevant, especially in the aftermath of the launch of *A National Employment and Training Plan for Young Australians* (Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1992) by the Prime Minister on 27 July 1992. Subsequently, the Youth Bureau, Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) was asked to prepare a report on how best to deliver these new initiatives to young people in regional and remote Australia. CAEPR prepared a submission for the Youth Bureau in October 1992 on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. Earlier, in June 1992, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs announced a Young People's Employment Program as part of the Commonwealth's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. While it is recognised that publishing 1986 Census data in 1993 provides a somewhat dated picture, they should be regarded primarily as a baseline from which to subsequently compare 1991 Census data.

Dr Daly is publishing this work which forms part of a larger project for two main reasons. First, it is important that the results of her research at CAEPR and ABS are made widely available as soon as completed. Second, Dr Daly is seeking feedback, especially from academics, on this work-in-progress that might assist her overall project. The active collaboration between CAEPR and ABS in this research project is very welcome and the assistance of ABS staff is greatly appreciated.

Jon Altman
Series Editor
April 1993

The position of young Australians in the labour market has been of concern to policy-makers over the past two decades as unemployment rates of young people have remained high and well above the average for the total labour force. The Aboriginal population is on average younger than the total Australian population.¹ In 1986, 38.8 per cent of the Aboriginal population aged 15 and over was in the age category 15-24 years, compared with 21.7 per cent of the Australian population in general. The position of this group is therefore of particular concern as they may be doubly disadvantaged; Aboriginality and youth are both disadvantages in the labour market.

A further related issue of concern is the involvement of Aboriginal youth in the criminal justice system. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) and other studies (for example, Gale, Bailey-Harris and Wundersitz 1990) show that young Aboriginal people have been over-represented in the juvenile justice system throughout Australia. The RCIADIC noted as follows:

Not only do they come into the system to a disproportionate extent, the penalties which they receive are demonstrably more severe than those of equivalent non-Aboriginal juveniles and they have an accelerated progression through the various stages of the juvenile justice system until the point of detention in a juvenile institution (Commonwealth of Australia 1991: 254-5).

The importance of the restricted educational and employment opportunities available to Aboriginal youth in producing these results is strongly emphasised in the Royal Commission report (see, especially, chapters 14, 16, 17, 30 and 33). Low educational attainment and poor labour market outcomes may have major implications for the course of an individual's life.

Specific government policies, such as Priority One and the Social Strategy for Young Australians, have aimed to reduce the high levels of unemployment among youth in general by easing the transition from school to work. Schemes such as AUSTUDY and ABSTUDY have the explicit aim of encouraging young people to stay in education for longer periods based on the assumption, for which there is some empirical support, that the more educated are more likely to find work (Miller and Volker 1987; Daly 1991b).² The purpose of this paper is to document the labour market status and educational attainment of young Aboriginal people as recorded in the 1986 Census, and to compare them with those of the rest of Australian youth. When 1991 Census data become available, the results presented here will provide a benchmark for comparison between 1986 and 1991.

The period 1986-91 has seen important policy changes with potential implications for Aboriginal youth. The Aboriginal Employment

Development Policy (AEDP), launched in 1987, aims to promote Aboriginal employment and the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP), launched in 1989, focuses on Aboriginal education. The AEDP has the goal of increasing Aboriginal employment rates to match those of the rest of the Australian population, and of reducing Aboriginal welfare dependence (Australian Government 1987; Altman 1991).

The AEP, established in response to the report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1988), is an agreement between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1992: 58) highlights the following four main goals:

- i to increase the involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision-making;
- ii to ensure equality of access to educational services;
- iii to achieve equity of educational participation; and
- iv to enable equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

In addition to the AEP, the Aboriginal Languages Initiative Program (ALIP) was established in 1992 to encourage the use of traditional Aboriginal languages.

The data presented here predate the introduction of these specific policies and therefore, in isolation, provide no information on the possible effects of these policies on the educational and employment status of young Aborigines. However, when used as a benchmark with which to compare 1991 Census data, the results should be indicative of the effects of these policies on the position of Aboriginal youth.³

The paper begins by presenting data on educational attainment and then considers the position of young people in the labour market. In most of the discussion, two broad age categories of youth have been recognised; those aged 15 to 19 years and those aged 20 to 24 years. These age categories cover periods of important life cycle changes. The first age category includes, for most people, the completion of secondary schooling and the transition to higher education or into the labour market. The second covers the beginnings of adult employment for those who left school at an earlier age and the transition from education into the labour market for those undertaking higher education. Where relevant, more detailed age breakdowns will be presented for Aboriginal people.⁴

Educational attainment levels of young Aborigines

Table 1 compares the age at which young Aboriginal people and other Australian youth had left school in 1986. The lower levels of educational attainment of Aboriginal people documented elsewhere (Tesfaghiorghis and Altman 1991) are evident here for young Aborigines. Among those aged 15-19 years (columns 1 and 2), a smaller proportion of Aboriginal males and females were still at school than was found in the rest of the Australian population; about 30 per cent compared with about 40 per cent for the non-Aboriginal population. This difference was offset by the higher proportion of Aboriginal males and females who had left school aged 14 or younger, prior to the legal school-leaving age; about 10 per cent of Aboriginal males and females aged 15-19 years had done so compared with 2 per cent of other Australians in this age category. A larger percentage of 15-19 year old females than males remained in school among both Aboriginal and other Australian youth.

Columns 3 and 4 of Table 1 relate to 20-24 year olds, almost all of whom had completed their secondary schooling. Most Aboriginal males and females of this age had left school when they were aged 15 or 16 years, although about 10 per cent had left school at a younger age. A much smaller proportion of non-Aboriginal people in this age category had left school before they were 15 years, and a larger proportion had continued to attend school until they were 17 or 18 years of age. Among the wider Australian population, 41 per cent of males and 45 per cent of females had left school when they were 17 or 18 years old, compared with 19 per cent of Aboriginal males and 22 per cent of Aboriginal females who left school at these ages. These substantial differences are summarised in the average years-of-schooling figures presented for each sex. Aboriginal males and females aged 20-24 had, on average, one less year of schooling than their counterparts in the wider Australian population.

There is some evidence that this figure may under-estimate the difference in educational attainment between the two groups. Age on leaving school is only a rough indicator of the time actually spent in schooling and the available evidence suggests that Aboriginal children have relatively high truancy rates (Commonwealth of Australia 1991: 364-68; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1992: 67). Literacy and numeracy skills may therefore fall substantially behind those of a school leaver of similar age but with regular attendance. Further evidence of lower levels of educational attainment, as measured by qualifications amongst young Aborigines, will be presented below in Table 4.

Table 1. Age on leaving school for Aboriginal and other Australian youth by sex and age category, 1986 (per cent).

Age on leaving school	15-19 years		20-24 years	
	Aborigines (1)	Others (2)	Aborigines (3)	Others (4)
Males				
12 or younger	1.3	0.1	1.6	0.4
13	1.5	0.2	1.9	0.4
14	8.3	1.6	8.8	2.7
15	28.5	16.0	32.5	21.0
16	20.7	22.0	30.8	30.3
17	7.0	14.0	13.6	25.6
18	1.9	6.8	5.8	15.1
19 and older	0.1	0.2	2.0	3.9
Still at school	28.9	38.9	0.3	0.0
Never attended school	1.7	0.2	2.6	0.4
Average years of completed schooling ^a			10.3	11.3
Females				
12 or younger	0.8	0.1	1.1	0.2
13	1.6	0.2	1.4	0.3
14	6.8	1.3	6.6	2.1
15	25.7	15.6	30.4	20.1
16	22.3	18.8	33.7	28.9
17	8.5	15.1	16.4	28.7
18	2.0	7.1	6.0	16.0
19 and older	0.2	0.1	2.0	3.5
Still at school	30.5	41.7	0.3	0.1
Never attended school	1.6	0.0	2.3	0.2
Average years of completed schooling ^a			10.5	11.4

a. These figures are calculated on the assumption that children begin school at the age of five. Calculations were not made for those aged 15-19 years because of the high proportions still attending school. Those aged 20-24 years and still attending school were omitted from the calculation.

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

Table 2 presents in more detail for Aborigines, the proportion at each age who were still attending school. Between the ages of 15 and 18, a higher percentage of Aboriginal females were at school than were Aboriginal males. In addition, there were marked differences between the proportion of Aboriginal males and females remaining at school in settled, compared with remote, Australia.⁵ Retention rates tended to be higher in settled Australia with one interesting exception. A slightly larger percentage of Aboriginal females aged 18 and 19 years were still attending school in the remote areas than was reported for settled Australia.

Evidence suggests that coming from a home where an Aboriginal language is spoken creates difficulties in being accommodated by the education system. This group were a minority of young Aborigines; less than one-fifth of Aboriginal people aged 15-24 years stated that the language spoken at home was an Aboriginal language rather than English. However, the percentage of Aboriginal language speakers who remained at school at almost every age was lower than among the Aboriginal population in general. Whether this represents differences in access to education or perceptions about the relevance and benefits of education is a topic for further research.⁶

Tables 1 and 2 relate to attendance in secondary schools, but Table 3 presents data on attendance at any educational institution by young people. The table shows that among Aborigines, a much smaller percentage of each age group was in education than among other Australians. Over one-third of Aboriginal people aged 15-19 years were attending some form of educational institution; over half of non-Aboriginal males and females were. The proportion of Aboriginal males and females aged 20-24 years who were still studying was less than half that of their counterparts in the rest of the Australian population.

Aborigines aged 15-19 years and attending an educational institution were more likely to be in secondary schools than at a tertiary institution. This concentration was more pronounced than among non-Aboriginal people. Attendance at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college was higher for males than for females.

TAFE attendance accounted for the largest proportion of those aged 20-24 years who were still studying. Over half the Aboriginal males and females attending an educational institution were at TAFE colleges. These colleges were less important among other Australians in this age group. Among this group, almost one-third of those attending an educational institution were at university compared with 14 per cent of Aboriginal males and 12 per cent of Aboriginal females.

Table 2. The percentage of Aborigines still at school by sex, age and location of residence, 1986.

Location of residence	Current age (years)									
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Males										
Settled	70.2	40.8	21.8	4.9	1.0	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.0
Remote	65.9	37.0	14.9	3.6	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.0
Total	68.8	39.6	19.4	4.5	1.1	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.0
Percentage among Aboriginal language speakers ^a	61.9	37.8	18.2	2.2	2.2	0.1	1.4	0.1	0.0	0.0
Females										
Settled	78.0	45.0	21.8	4.8	0.7	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2
Remote	69.0	40.1	17.4	5.1	1.4	0.2	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.6
Total	75.0	43.3	20.4	4.9	0.9	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3
Percentage among Aboriginal language speakers ^a	67.0	38.8	17.2	7.9	2.3	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0

a. The percentage of Aboriginal people who stated that they spoke an Aboriginal language rather than English at home. This group accounted for 16 per cent of both males and females aged 15-19 years and 18 per cent of both males and females aged 20-24 years.

Source: 1986 Census.

Table 3. Educational attendance by age and sex, 1986.

Type of educational institution	15-19 years		20-24 years	
	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent
Males				
Secondary (government)	70.8	45.4	2.7	0.2
Secondary (non-government)	9.6	21.0	0.0	0.2
TAFE	14.1	21.3	56.3	40.9
CAE	1.5	2.6	15.8	15.4
University	1.0	6.4	14.4	32.5
Other	3.2	3.2	10.8	10.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage of age group attending an educational institution	35.7	56.9	6.1	17.2
Females				
Secondary (government)	71.3	50.5	3.2	0.4
Secondary (non-government)	10.5	25.2	0.0	0.3
TAFE	11.2	10.1	56.0	35.0
CAE	2.7	5.1	18.4	17.7
University	1.7	6.1	11.5	31.5
Other	2.5	3.1	10.8	15.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Percentage of age group attending an educational institution	37.5	53.7	6.4	13.4

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

There is some evidence to suggest that combining education with employment has a positive effect on the duration of the first post-school job (McRae 1992). Aboriginal youth were, however, less likely to combine education and employment than were other Australian youth. Thirteen per cent of Aboriginal males and 15 per cent of Aboriginal females aged 15-24 years combined education with some form of employment. This compared with 36 per cent of non-Aboriginal males and 29 per cent of non-Aboriginal females who combined the two activities. Among those at secondary school, 2 per cent of Aboriginal males and 3 per cent of Aboriginal females worked, while 13 per cent of non-Aboriginal males and 16 per cent of non-Aboriginal females combined secondary school attendance with a job. Only 48 per cent of Aborigines attending TAFE were employed compared with 74 per cent of other Australians. University and College of Advanced Education (CAE)

education was less likely to be combined with a job than TAFE courses although 25 per cent of Aboriginal and 39 per cent of non-Aboriginal university and CAE students worked.

The importance of TAFE as an educational institution is reflected in the types of qualifications held by those aged 20-24 years as presented in Table 4. This group has been selected for this comparison, as a larger proportion of those aged 15-19 years were yet to complete their education. The most frequently reported qualifications for males were trade qualifications usually acquired from TAFE colleges. Aboriginal males were, however, less likely to hold these qualifications than were males in general. Twenty-four per cent of non-Aboriginal males aged 20-24 years held trade qualifications compared with 10 per cent of Aboriginal males. There was also a substantial difference between the two groups of males in the proportion holding university degrees. While 5 per cent of non-Aboriginal males in this age group held university degrees, this applied to only 0.3 per cent of Aboriginal males. The proportion of Aboriginal males without any educational qualification was correspondingly larger, 84 per cent compared with 60 per cent.

Table 4. Level of qualification for those aged 20-24 years by sex, 1986.

Type of educational qualification	Males		Females	
	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent
University degree	0.3	5.1	0.4	5.6
Diploma	0.4	1.3	1.1	3.3
Trade certificate	9.6	23.8	1.2	2.7
Other certificate	5.8	9.6	10.3	20.4
No qualification	83.9	60.3	87.1	68.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

There were large gender differences in the types of qualifications held, but the general result that Aboriginal males were less likely to hold a qualification than non-Aboriginal males held also for females. Eighty-seven per cent of Aboriginal females held no recognised qualification compared with 68 per cent of the non-Aboriginal female population. Trade qualifications accounted for a much smaller proportion of qualifications held by females than by males, but other certificates were

more important. Gender did not appear to be an important determinant of the proportion with university qualifications, but among females, as among males, Aborigines were far less likely to hold a university degree.

In summary, this section has presented some evidence on the educational attainment of young Aborigines as reported in the 1986 Census. It shows, using indicators of school attendance and attainment of qualifications, that Aboriginal people fell behind other Australian youth. A higher proportion of young Aboriginal females than males were still at school at the time of the census. This gender difference was also apparent for the rest of the Australian population. However, a measure of qualifications which includes trade qualifications gained through a mix of on-the-job training and desk-based work, shows that young Aboriginal males were more likely to hold a qualification than young Aboriginal females. These differences reflect the varying methods of skill acquisition for different occupations and the importance of gender in determining occupation (see Taylor 1992). Young Aboriginal people were less likely to combine education and employment than were other young Australians. It is possible that this lack of early working experience and the chance to establish contacts in the labour market are contributing factors in reducing the probability of full-time employment for Aboriginal people.

Labour force status

The transition of young people from education to participation in the labour force is apparent in the data presented in Table 5. The proportion of those aged 20-24 years who were outside the labour force was smaller for each sex and racial group than among those aged 15-19 years. The broad picture is one of lower rates of employment amongst Aboriginal people, higher rates of unemployment and a larger group of people outside the labour market than amongst non-Aboriginal people. Among the wider Australian population aged 15-24, most people who were not in the labour force were studying; 87 per cent of males and 64 per cent of females. There was, however, a much larger group of Aboriginal people for whom the census provides little information as they were neither in the labour force nor attending an educational institution. In the 15-24 years age group 53 per cent of Aboriginal males and 67 per cent of Aboriginal females classified as 'not in the labour force' (NILF) and were not in education. This lack of information on their activities creates a substantial gap in our knowledge of the activities of young Aboriginal people.

Table 5. The labour force status of young Aborigines and other Australians by sex, 1986.

Age	Labour force status ^d						Not in labour force	Total
	Full-time ^a employment	Part-time ^b employment	Total employment ^c	Full-time ^e unemployment	Part-time ^f unemployment	Total labour force		
Males								
Aborigines								
15-19 years	18.0	5.5	25.6	22.7	4.3	52.5	47.5	100.0
20-24 years	35.1	7.7	45.7	28.1	4.3	78.1	21.9	100.0
Total	25.7	6.5	34.7	25.2	4.3	64.1	35.9	100.0
Non-Aborigines								
15-19 years	36.8	10.9	49.0	9.4	1.5	59.9	40.2	100.0
20-24 years	68.6	10.2	79.3	11.0	1.2	91.5	8.5	100.0
Total	53.5	10.5	65.1	10.2	1.3	76.6	23.3	100.0
Females								
Aborigines								
15-19 years	12.1	6.1	19.4	16.0	4.8	40.2	59.8	100.0
20-24 years	18.9	8.0	28.9	13.1	5.0	46.7	53.1	100.0
Total	15.2	7.0	23.7	14.7	4.9	43.3	56.7	100.0

Continued over page.

Table 5. Continued.

Age	Labour force status ^d							Total
	Full-time ^a employment	Part-time ^b employment	Total employment ^c	Full-time ^e unemployment	Part-time ^f unemployment	Total labour force	Not in labour force	
Females cont.								
Non-Aborigines								
15-19 years	29.5	16.1	46.3	8.6	2.3	57.2	42.8	100.0
20-24 years	52.1	15.7	68.5	7.0	2.1	77.6	22.5	100.0
Total	41.2	15.8	58.0	7.8	2.2	68.0	32.0	100.0

a. 35+ hours worked per week.

b. Less than 35 hours per week.

c. Includes those who stated that they were employed but did not state their hours of work.

d. Excludes those who did not state their labour force status.

e. Includes those who were actively looking for full-time employment.

f. Includes those who were actively looking for part-time employment.

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

Among those aged 15-19 years, over half of Aboriginal males and females considered themselves to be NILF while about 40 per cent of non-Aboriginal males and females were classified to this group. The NILF category substantially declined in importance among 20-24 year olds with the exception of Aboriginal females. Only 8.5 per cent of non-Aboriginal males aged 20-24 years were outside the labour force. The proportion of Aboriginal males and non-Aboriginal females in this category was close to 22 per cent, but over half of Aboriginal females remained outside the labour force. Even among young Aboriginal females, participation in the labour force had not become the major activity.

In each age category for both sexes, the proportion in employment was much higher among non-Aborigines than among Aborigines. There were also important differences in the proportion who were unemployed and looking for either full-time or part-time work. Unemployment among Aboriginal males was more than twice that of non-Aboriginal males. Thirty per cent of young Aboriginal males aged 15-24 were unemployed, compared with 11.5 per cent of non-Aboriginal males. The differences, while remaining large, were smaller for females. Nineteen per cent of Aboriginal females aged 15-24 were unemployed compared with 10 per cent of non-Aboriginal females. It is interesting to note the larger proportion of both Aboriginal males and females who were looking for part-time work.

Other studies of Aboriginal labour market participation (Ross 1991; Daly 1991a, 1991b) have emphasised place of residence as an important factor in determining labour market outcomes. These studies show that the size of the settlement in which the individual resided appeared to be a more important determinant of labour force status for Aboriginal people than for non-Aboriginal people. This result applied for young people. There was little difference in the proportion of non-Aboriginal males in employment in the three settlement categories identified: major urban centres, other urban and rural.⁷ However, among young Aboriginal males, as for Aboriginal males in general,⁸ the employment/population ratio was lower in rural areas than in major urban areas and this difference was offset by a higher proportion of Aboriginal males being classified as outside the labour force. The census recorded the highest unemployment rates for Aboriginal males in the 'other urban' category. Thirty per cent of 15-19 year old males and 37 per cent of 20-24 year old males living in these towns were unemployed, compared with 28 and 32 per cent of each age category in the major urban areas and 22 and 28 per cent in rural areas. Non-Aboriginal females were less likely to be in employment and more likely to be outside the labour force, if they lived in a rural, rather than urban, area. Among Aboriginal females this tendency was more pronounced. As for males, the measured rate of unemployment was highest in the 'other urban' category.

The causes of the higher rate of Aboriginal youth unemployment have been subjected to a more sophisticated analysis in a series of studies based on data taken from both the census and the Australian Longitudinal Survey (ALS). Miller (1989a, 1989b, 1991) investigated the influence of Aboriginality on the probability of a young individual being unemployed. In the context of a formal model of the determinants of unemployment, he controlled for factors such as education levels, marital status and number of children, location of residence, age and, where relevant, the employment status of a spouse, to investigate whether an independent influence of Aboriginality on the probability of an individual being unemployed could be observed. He concluded that holding all these other factors constant:

the unemployment rate of Aboriginal youth is predicted to be about two-and-one-half times greater than that of other groups. This standardised unemployment rate differential is one of the most pronounced in the youth labour market (Miller 1989a: 12).

The difference in unemployment rates could be explained only partially by differences in measured characteristics, such as education levels and age. The major part of the differences in unemployment probabilities remained unexplained and could be attributed to either cultural differences in labour supply behaviour or differences in the demand for Aboriginal labour arising, perhaps, from discrimination. Miller's results therefore support the hypothesis that there are important differences in the determinants of employment status for young Aboriginals compared with non-Aboriginal people which go beyond differences in the measured attributes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth.

Tables 6 to 8 describe the activities of employed youth in more detail. Table 6 relates to their occupational distribution. Among both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 15-19 year old males, employment was heavily concentrated in the two broad occupational categories: tradespersons and labourers; these two categories accounted for 79 per cent of Aboriginal and 67 per cent of non-Aboriginal employment. An interesting difference between the two groups was in the proportion working as salespersons. Five per cent of Aboriginal 15-19 year old males were occupied as salespersons, compared with 13.4 per cent of other Australian males in this age category.⁹

The older 20-24 year age group of males were spread more widely across the broad occupational categories but labouring remained the most frequent occupation for Aboriginal males. Aboriginal males aged 20-24 years were concentrated among the lower-skilled occupations. Once again Aboriginal males were under-represented as salespersons compared with other Australian males.

Trades occupations were far less important for females than they were for males. Among those females aged 15-19 years, 68 per cent of Aborigines and 78 per cent of other Australians were in the two occupational categories of clerks and salespersons. Sales occupations were once again less important for Aboriginal females than for other Australian females. The proportion of Aboriginal females occupied as labourers was twice that of non-Aboriginal females of this age.

Table 6. Occupation of employed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, 1986.

	15-19 years		20-24 years	
	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent
Males				
Managers and administrators	1.8	3.2	1.9	5.6
Professionals	1.3	1.6	3.1	7.2
Para-professionals	3.4	2.4	4.5	5.7
Tradespersons	30.4	36.6	25.8	30.8
Clerks	5.3	6.9	7.1	10.2
Salespersons, etc.	5.1	13.4	3.9	10.5
Plant and machinery operators and drivers	4.1	5.5	11.7	10.3
Labourers	48.7	30.4	41.9	19.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Females				
Managers and administrators	0.8	0.7	1.0	2.4
Professionals	2.3	1.7	5.9	10.0
Para-professionals	3.5	1.9	6.5	7.8
Tradespersons	6.2	6.6	4.9	4.0
Clerks	39.2	34.3	45.1	40.1
Salespersons, etc.	28.7	44.1	17.0	23.7
Plant and machinery operators and drivers	2.3	1.6	2.6	3.1
Labourers	17.0	9.0	17.1	9.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

The proportion of females who were classified as clerks actually increased among those aged 20-24 years and salespersons declined in significance. There was a growth in the share of those working in professional and para-professional occupations. The proportion of Aboriginal females employed as labourers remained at about twice that of other Australian females.

Table 7 presents data on the distribution of youth employment by broad industry group. There were substantial differences between the industry distribution of employment for Aboriginal people aged 15-19 years compared with non-Aboriginal males. More than 50 per cent of non-Aboriginal males in this age category were employed in two industries, manufacturing and the wholesale and retail trade. In contrast, Aboriginal males were spread over a wider range of industries. Wholesale and retail trade, community services, agriculture and manufacturing were the major industries of Aboriginal male employment. The relatively small proportion of Aboriginal males occupied as salespersons (see Table 6) was reflected in the smaller proportion of Aboriginal males working in wholesale and retail trade. This difference is significant as the wholesale and retail sector is typically the major employer of these young males.¹⁰ In common with findings for the whole of the Aboriginal population, a much larger proportion of 15-19 year old Aboriginal males were employed in community services and public administration than were males in the rest of the population.

These differences were apparent in the industry distribution of 20-24 year old males, although wholesale and retail trade had ceased to dominate their employment so dramatically. The three largest industry employers of non-Aboriginal males aged 20-24 years were wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing and construction. The major employers of male Aboriginal labour were community services, public administration and manufacturing.

Aboriginal females also showed a different employment pattern to their counterparts in the wider population. Community services and public administration were more prominent as employers of Aboriginal females than of other females. This was especially the case among 15-19 year old females. While almost half of non-Aboriginal females aged 15-19 years were employed in wholesale and retail trade, a smaller 27 per cent of Aboriginal females in this age category worked in this industry. Another industry where Aboriginal females were relatively under-represented was finance, property and business services.

Table 7. Industry of employment for Aboriginal and other Australian youth, 1986.

	15-19 years		20-24 years	
	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent
Males				
Agriculture	13.8	5.7	9.0	5.2
Mining	2.5	1.3	2.9	2.0
Manufacturing	13.0	20.2	12.1	20.7
Electricity, gas, water	1.1	1.4	2.0	3.0
Construction	9.1	10.1	10.9	10.6
Wholesale, retail trade	18.0	37.3	11.3	20.6
Transport, storage	3.8	3.7	7.8	6.2
Communications	1.4	1.3	1.5	2.4
Finance, property etc.	2.3	6.2	2.8	9.4
Public administration	12.5	4.4	14.6	7.0
Community services	18.0	2.6	20.5	7.0
Recreatn, personal services	4.5	6.0	4.7	5.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Females				
Agriculture	3.0	0.9	3.0	1.3
Mining	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.5
Manufacturing	5.7	7.2	6.4	10.8
Electricity, gas, water	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.9
Construction	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.6
Wholesale, retail trade	26.8	45.5	12.5	22.9
Transport, storage	2.0	1.6	1.9	2.4
Communications	1.2	0.6	1.5	1.2
Finance, property etc.	6.6	18.0	7.6	17.9
Public administration	13.3	3.1	15.2	7.2
Community services	30.5	9.9	41.4	23.2
Recreatn, personal services	9.0	11.2	8.0	10.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

Table 8 presents the industry data on the basis of sector of employment. Aboriginal males and females in each of the age categories were more likely to be employed in the public sector than were other Australians. These figures present a minimum estimate of the difference as many Aboriginal organisations funded by the government to provide services usually carried out by local governments, are classified as private (Altman and Daly 1992). Thirty per cent of Aboriginal males aged 15-19 years worked in the public sector, as defined here, compared with 13 per cent

of other Australian males of this age. The public sector was even more important among 20-24 year old males. Forty per cent of Aboriginal males aged 20-24 years worked for the government compared with 24 per cent of other males. State and local governments were more important as employers of young Aboriginal males than for other Australian males.

Table 8. Government and private sector employment of Aboriginal and other Australian youth, 1986.

	15-19 years		20-24 years	
	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent	Aborigines Per cent	Others Per cent
Males				
Government				
Australian	7.1	5.8	9.7	9.8
State	15.3	6.0	20.4	12.0
Local	8.0	1.5	9.6	2.3
Private sector	69.6	86.7	60.3	75.9
Females				
Government				
Australian	11.4	4.4	15.1	8.9
State	18.1	8.2	27.2	17.3
Local	5.2	1.4	3.9	1.8
Private sector	65.3	86.0	53.9	72.0

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

Aboriginal females, especially those aged 20-24 years were even more likely to be employed in the public sector than were Aboriginal males or other Australian youth. Almost half of the Aboriginal females aged 20-24 who were in employment were employed by government. The Australian government and State governments were the major two employers.

In summary, many of the differences which are apparent in a comparison of the labour market characteristics of the total Aboriginal population with the rest of the Australian population, are in evidence among young Aborigines. The data presented here do not suggest that there has been a dramatic change in the types of economic activities being undertaken by the new Aboriginal entrants to the labour market. Aboriginal youth tended to be employed in the lower-skilled occupations and to be concentrated in public sector employment to a greater extent than other Australian youth. The next section will present data on the implications of

Table 9. Median incomes of Aboriginal and other Australian youth by labour force status, 1986.

Labour force status	15-19 years		20-24 years	
	Aborigines (1)	Others (2)	Aborigines (3)	Others (4)
Males				
Labour force status				
Employed	\$10,097	\$8,271	\$13,201	\$16,143
Ratio (1)/(2), (3)/(4)	1.2		0.8	
Unemployed	\$3,650	\$3,284	\$5,103	\$5,015
Ratio (1)/(2), (3)/(4)	1.1		1.0	
Not in the labour force	\$0	\$0 ^a	\$4662	\$3,297
Ratio (1)/(2), (3)/(4)	1		1.4	
Total	\$3,482	\$3,280	\$7,872	\$14,247
Ratio (1)/(2), (3)/(4)	1.1		0.6	
Females				
Employed	\$7,744	\$7,697	\$12,311	\$13,794
Ratio (1)/(2), (3)/(4)	1.0		0.9	
Unemployed	\$3,565	\$3,254	\$5,030	\$4,473
Ratio (1)/(2), (3)/(4)	1.1		1.12	
Not in the labour force	\$115	\$0 ^a	\$5,404	\$2,864
Ratio(1)/(2), (3)/(4)		1.9		
Total	\$3,390	\$2,698	\$6,519	\$10,859
Ratio (1)/(2), (3)/(4)	1.3		0.6	

a. The income data for the non-Aboriginal population were presented in broader categories than for the Aboriginal population. In estimating the median, it has been necessary to assume that individuals are evenly distributed across the whole income range but in the case of the initial category for non-Aborigines of \$0-4,000, evidence from the more detailed Aboriginal income distribution suggests that this is not so for 15-19 year olds who are outside the labour force. About 60 per cent of Aboriginal males and 68 per cent of Aboriginal females aged 15-19 with incomes of between \$0 and \$4,000 had an income of \$0. The older 20-24 year olds were more evenly spread across this income range. In calculating the median income for non-Aborigines aged 15-19 years, it has therefore been assumed that non-Aboriginal youth who were not in the labour force were similarly concentrated at zero income. This adjustment is also used in calculating the median for the total population in this age group.

Source: 1986 Census, full Aboriginal sub-file and the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample.

these differences for the income status of Aboriginal youth compared with other Australian youth.

The income of young Aborigines

Table 9 presents data on the median income of young people according to their labour market status. Among 15-19 year old males and females in aggregate, there was little difference in median income. Aboriginal males aged 15-19 years had a median income slightly higher than other Australian males in this age group, while Aboriginal females had an average income 1.3 times that of other Australian females. In each labour force group, Aboriginal people of this age actually had a higher average income than other young Australians.

These are surprising results and perhaps can be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, part-time employment was greater for non-Aboriginal than for Aboriginal 15-19 year olds and the category 'employment' covers both full- and part-time workers. Furthermore, relatively more Aboriginal youth were receiving educational benefits, such as ABSTUDY, which would boost their individual incomes. One final possible explanation of the higher employment income of Aboriginal compared to non-Aboriginal 15-19 year olds may arise from the types of employment undertaken by this age group. If non-Aboriginal youth were more likely to be in employment which involved a training element, for example apprenticeships and the figures on attendance at TAFE colleges support this hypothesis, this would be reflected in lower pay compared with Aboriginal youth who were more likely to be working in a labouring job where no investment in human capital was taking place.

The income differences were more pronounced for 20-24 year olds. Aboriginal males and females of this age had a median income 60 per cent that of their counterparts in the rest of the population. The figures presented here emphasise the importance of employment in raising income. It is the large difference of over 30 percentage points for males and 40 percentage points for females, in the share of 20-24 year olds in employment, which accounts for the substantial difference in median income.

Conclusion

The position of young Aboriginal people in the labour market and in the education system are important indicators of the effects of policy because it is among this group that signs of improvement in these indicators of socioeconomic status should be most apparent. For example, a policy

aimed at raising Aboriginal educational attainment will have little direct impact on the educational levels of people aged over 50, but rather should influence the attainment of those currently completing their education.

While there have been substantial improvements in the educational attainment of Aboriginal people in the last twenty years, this paper shows that a large gap remains to be closed before the AEP goal of equity in educational attainment is achieved. In 1986, Aboriginal males and females aged 20-24 years had completed a year's less schooling than their counterparts in the rest of the Australian community. This is probably a conservative estimate of the differences in educational attainment between the groups as evidence suggests that Aboriginal truancy rates are particularly high. The 'effective' education that they have received for a given number of years at school is likely to be lower than for more regular attenders. A lower level of educational attainment was also apparent in the smaller proportion of Aboriginal youth with educational qualifications.

The evidence on labour market activity also suggests that young Aborigines remain at a disadvantage compared with other Australian youth. They were less likely to be in employment and more likely to be unemployed. A large group of young Aboriginal people, especially females, remained outside the labour force, and as they were not recorded as attending an educational institution, the census provides no information on their activities.

The data presented here show that those Aboriginal people in employment were in lower-skilled jobs than their non-Aboriginal counterparts and were more likely to be in public sector employment. The differences in the employment rate and the types of work of Aboriginal and other Australian youth have important implications for their income status. Among those aged 15-19 years, there was little difference in median incomes for the two racial groups, but among 20-24 year olds, where a larger proportion of non-Aboriginal people were in employment, Aboriginal median income fell to 60 per cent of that of non-Aboriginal people.

This data will provide a benchmark for comparing the 1991 Census results. The expectation is that there will be some evidence of improvement in 1991. The increasing number of participants in the Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP) should have reduced the unemployment rate, and there is some evidence (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1992: 66-70) of higher education retention rates among Aborigines. However, the CDEP scheme, based as it is on part-time employment for an unemployment benefit equivalent, will not have

overcome the problem of much lower money incomes for young Aboriginal people. This remains a longer-term issue for policy.

Notes

1. In this paper, the terms 'Aboriginals' and 'Aborigines' will be used to refer to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations of Australia, throughout.
2. AUSTUDY was introduced in 1987 to provide income support for people over the age of 16 years wishing to continue full-time secondary and tertiary studies. The benefits depend on parental income and assets except where the student is classed as independent and their own income and assets are tested. ABSTUDY was introduced with similar aims to AUSTUDY, 'To encourage and assist Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available to all Australians' (DEET 1991:88). It has a secondary and tertiary component and provides additional assistance to cover educational expenses beyond direct income support. Some ABSTUDY benefits are available earlier than AUSTUDY benefits; full-time secondary students and those still at primary school and aged 14 years are entitled to ABSTUDY (Schooling).
3. Some evidence from sources other than the census is presented in the report prepared by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1992) on urban Aborigines. It suggests that there has been some improvement in school retention rates for Aboriginal children in recent years (chapter 4).
4. The data for the comparisons with the non-Aboriginal population are derived from the 1 per cent section-of-State public use sample of the 1986 Census which did not include information on individual ages but for the two age categories, 15-19 years and 20-24 years. It was therefore not possible to include more detailed data relating to the non-Aboriginal population.
5. Settled Australia includes the south-eastern coastal strip and the area around Perth, while the remaining areas are classified as remote. For a more detailed description and discussion of this geographical division see Daly (1992).
6. See Keefe (1992) for a discussion of the relevance of standard educational curricula to Aboriginal people.
7. These categories are derived from the section-of State variable in the Census. The three settlement size categories used here are defined as follows: an urban centre is 'one or more adjoining collection districts with urban characteristics and representing a population cluster of 1,000 or more people' (ABS 1986:150). Major urban centres had over 100,000 inhabitants and other urban areas between 1,000 and 99,999 inhabitants. The rural category used here includes both ABS categories 'rural locality' and 'rural balance'. Localities include population clusters which can 'be expected to contain at least 200 people (but not more than 999) by the next census; have at least 40 occupied non-farm dwellings with a discernible urban street pattern; have a discernible nucleus of population' (ABS 1986: 97). The rural balance includes all the collection districts not included elsewhere (ABS 1986: 132).
8. See Ross (1991) for a comparison of the employment/population rates of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal males and females of working age.

9. This result could be interpreted as providing some superficial evidence of consumer discrimination against Aboriginal people. Becker (1957: 57) hypothesised that 'a consumer's evaluation of a retail store may be based not only on the prices, speed of service, and reliability but also on the sex, race, religion and personality of the sales personnel'. Where consumers discriminated against a particular racial group, that group would be less likely to be found in direct contact with customers.
10. See, for example, Daly (1990) who compared the distribution of the employment of 16-19 year old males by industry in Australia, Great Britain and the United States of America. In each of these countries, in 1981, wholesale and retail trade was the largest industry employer of young male labour, accounting for at least a quarter of total employment.

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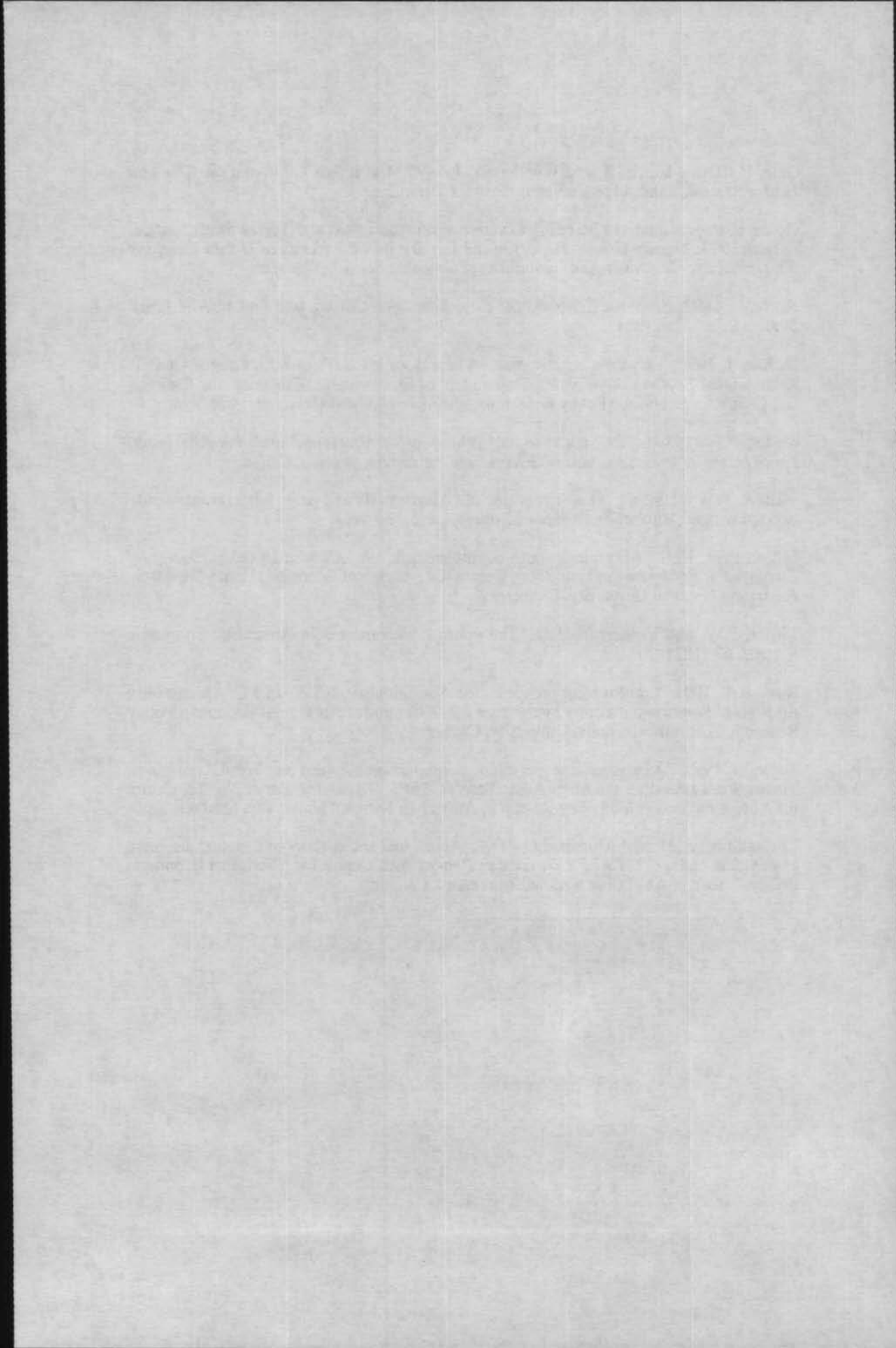
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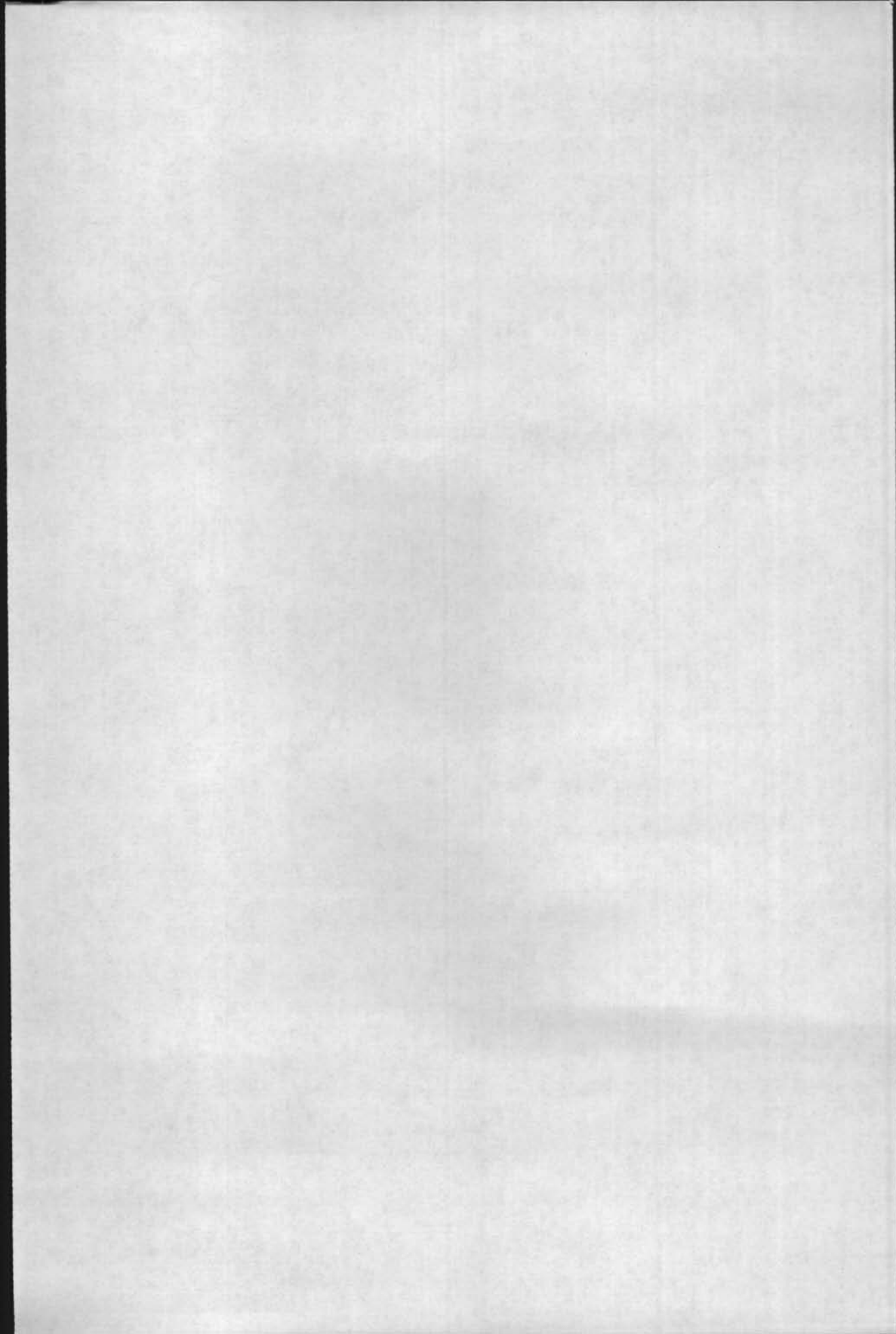
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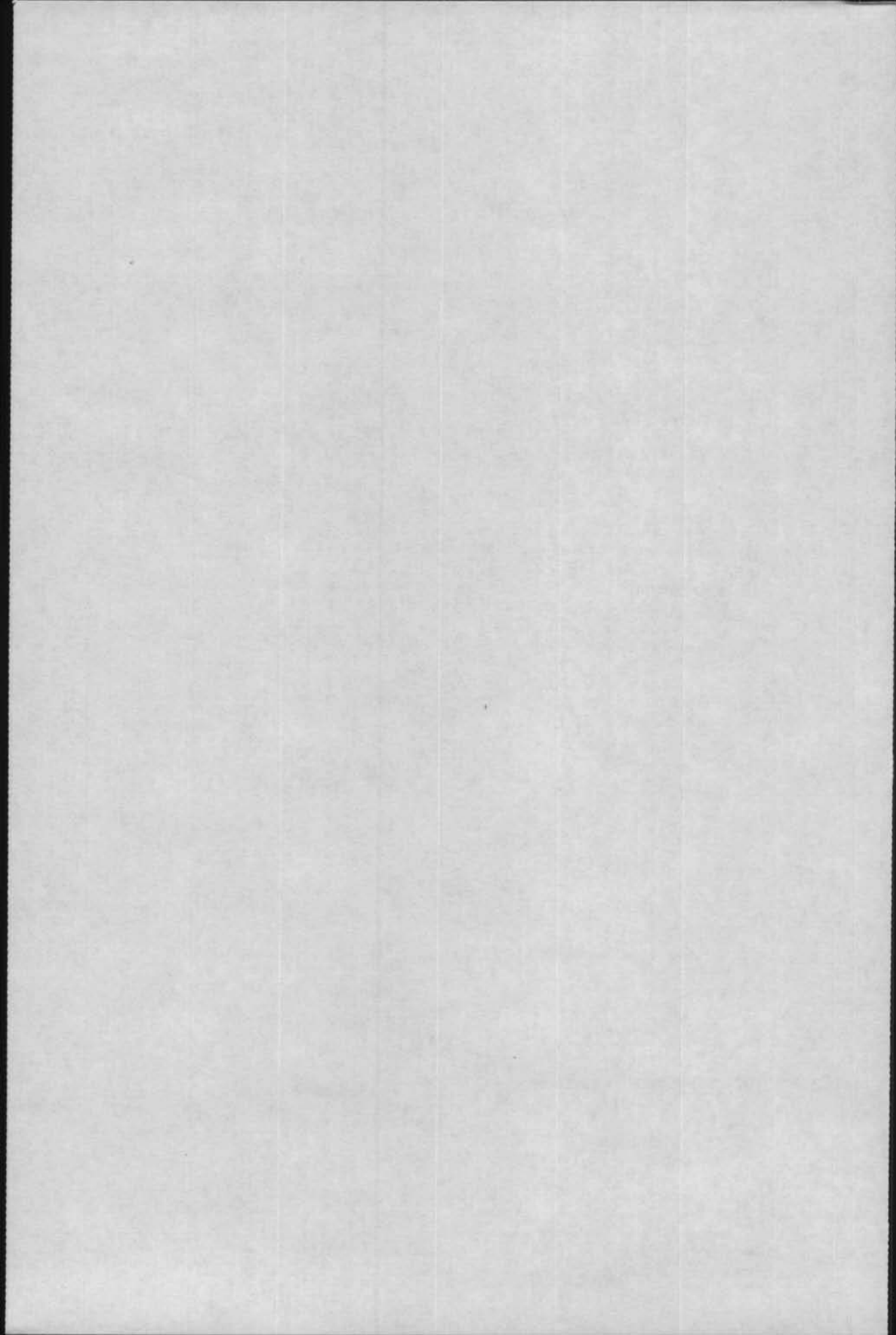
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